

Consideration and evaluation of the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site for deaccession

The Ernie Pyle State Historic Site was established in 1976 and is located in Dana, Vermillion County, Indiana. The site consists of the house from the farm where Ernie Pyle was born, the visitor center (two linked, reconstructed WWII era Quonset huts) which house exhibits, gift shop and library and maintenance garage. The site memorializes the life of war correspondent, Ernie Pyle and his Pulitzer Prize winning works documenting the lives of soldiers during WWII. The site is not on the National Register of Historic Places because the house was moved from its original location thus does not illustrate the original setting or appearance. The Greek revival architecture of the house is of note. The property's location in Dana, Indiana, means that there is ready access to utilities. A sewage treatment facility is currently planned with municipal sewers eventually replacing the individual septic systems in the town.

The house has been extensively researched because of controversy arising from the documentation (and lack thereof) of Ernie Pyle's birth in the actual structure. Currently, there are two schools of thought on the subject, one as adamant as the other. One of the previous site managers completed his Master's Thesis on this subject, finding no primary documents neither proving nor disproving either theory. Thus, there is not sufficient historic significance to justify the costs of continued rehabilitation and maintenance.

Fiscal concerns have been mounting with the historic site since 1996, a year after the opening of the Visitor Center. In the last five years, visitation has hovered between 1,000 and 1,800 visitors per year with revenue averaging \$7,200. Both of these numbers are three times less than any other State Historic Site. Factoring in approximately \$50,000 in capital costs over the same time period, the cost per visitor is extremely high. Reduction in operating hours has not had significant impact on the number of annual visitors or revenue.

One of the main factors affecting the visitation and revenue is the site's remote location. Dana is not on a major interstate nor is it within convenient driving distance of one. An unfortunate fire in 2006 burned more than ½ of its downtown area and the town has not recovered. Far more visitors can be exposed (approximately 70,000) to Ernie Pyle's life work through incorporation into the Indiana State Museum's permanent exhibits.

For the reasons stated, the Ernie Pyle State Historic Site is recommended for deaccession. As is standard practice for the division, an arrangement with a non-profit group is being pursued to take over operational duties. The obvious choice is the Friends of Ernie Pyle, the site's support organization. The Friends group was offered the site in December, 2009, with final determination still pending. Should the group decline and none other steps in, the division will pursue appropriate disposition.

Code Authority

IC 14-20-1-15

The director may, with the approval of the commission, adopt rules under IC 4-22-2 to administer [the State Museums and Historic Sites].

IC 14-20-1-23 (b)

The commission may, on recommendation of the trustees, sell, lease or exchange historic property administered by the department under IC 4-20-5-7 or IC 5-22-22.

Under 14-20-1-15, the following Indiana Administrative Code apply:

312 IAC 24-3-5 Procedure for authorization by the department for deaccession of historic property.

Sec. 5 (a) Before historic property is deaccessioned, the trustees shall consider and evaluate the property according to the factors contained in section 6 of this rule. The trustees shall not recommend that a property be deaccessioned except during a public meeting of the trustees. An opportunity shall be provided to any interested person to comment in writing or during the public meeting concerning whether the property should be deaccessioned. No employee of the department may be disciplined or otherwise sanctioned by the department because the employee exercises the opportunity to comment provided under this subsection.

(b) If the trustees determine to recommend that the historic property be deaccessioned, the recommendation shall be submitted to the commission for final action of the department.

© The commission may direct that a public hearing be conducted for final action that is taken under subsection (b).

(d) If the final action of the commission is to deaccession the historic property, that determination shall be referred by the secretary of the commission to the Indiana department of administration for disposition of the property.

312 IAC 24-3-6 Factors for evaluating historic property

Sec. 6. In evaluating whether historic property administered by the division should be deaccessioned, the department shall consider the following factors:

- (1) Whether the property illustrated, interprets, or is identified with an important aspect of Indiana history or prehistory.
- (2) Whether the property duplicates another state historic site administered by the department.
- (3) Whether the property retains its original appearance, setting and materials.
- (4) Whether the property has sufficient historical significance to justify the costs of continued rehabilitation and maintenance.
- (5) Whether the property is readily accessible to the public.
- (6) Whether the property has ready access to utilities.
- (7) Whether the property currently generates or could generate future revenues.
- (8) Other factors which promote the purposes of IC 14-20-1 and this article.